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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001039

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT TELLS AMBASSADOR SHE IS UNDER PRESSURE,
INTENDS TO GO AHEAD WITH JOINT MECHANISM -- BUT NOT SURE
WHEN

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD FOR REASON 1.4 (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Kumaratunga told Ambassador she intends to sign the Joint Mechanism, she hopes by end of the month. She believes the JVP will not leave the Government if she signs. She asked for strong Co-Chair support for the Joint Mechanism. She will discuss the Joint Mechanism with Opposition Leader Wickremesinghe shortly. She appeared to admit Government forces may be involved in the recent Cease Fire violations. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Ambassador called on President Chandrika Kumaratunga evening of June 9 in preparation for his departure for Washington to attend Co-Chairs meeting. Kumaratunga bustled in and dismissed MFA notetaker--"I want to speak to the Ambassador one-on-one." Apologizing for being late, she said that she was under a lot of strain. "I have to make hard decisions which impinge on the future of the government and the country." She then asked Ambassador about the upcoming Co-Chairs meeting.

13. (C) Ambassador said that the meeting was important for several reasons:

--It would be the first Co-Chairs meeting since the second Bush Administration began its term, and therefore would introduce some new players.

--The debate about the Joint Mechanism for tsunami reconstruction in the North and East was reaching a crucial point.

--The ceasefire seemed to be under increasing pressure, with killings taking place by both sides.

Ambassador noted this meeting would take place almost exactly two years after the original Tokyo meeting where Co-Chair mechanism had originated. Co-Chairs had begun on the premise that it was a vehicle by which the international community could support the Sri Lankan peace process. If the peace process could not progress due to internal factors in Sri Lanka, then Co-Chairs would have to consider and re-assess just what their role should be. If there were no progress, then international attention would naturally move to other areas and problems. Specifically, if the GSL and the LTTE could not agree on the Joint Mechanism--an administrative measure to deal with reconstruction needs--then the international community would have to wonder how they could make progress on much more complicated and politically difficult issues in the peace process. Ambassador concluded that the purpose of the Co-Chairs was to assist in the peace process, working as a partner. What did the President think would be a useful contribution from the Co-Chairs?

14. (C) Kumaratunga responded by saying that she was committed to the Joint Mechanism and would have it signed--"certainly by the end of the month." The JVP, she said, was not only agitating against the mechanism, but was also canvassing members of her own SLFP party. The JVP was saying that at the recent Development Forum the donors had promised their money anyway whether or not there was a Joint Mechanism, so why was it needed? Only the President wanted it. Ambassador said that donors had made clear that their tsunami relief was not conditional, but that they believed the Joint Mechanism would both make tsunami reconstruction more effective and provide a boost to the peace process. In addition, smaller donor countries wanted to channel their assistance through the World Bank Trust Fund that would be set up in conjunction with the Joint Mechanism. Kumaratunga said it would be immensely helpful to her if the Co-Chairs made it clear that the Joint Mechanism was important both for reconstruction

implementation and as a confidence building measure for the peace process.

15. (C) Ambassador asked if she thought the JVP would leave the government if she signed the Joint Mechanism. Kumaratunga said she was 90 percent sure they would not leave. The JVP values its Ministerial portfolios too much, she said. She then said that Opposition Leader and UNP head Ranil Wickremesinghe had asked to come over and talk to her about the Joint Mechanism and she would see him the next day. Ambassador said that he had spoken to Wickremesinghe two days before and had impressed upon him also that if the Joint Mechanism failed, the attention of the international community might move elsewhere. Kumaratunga went on that if the Government could not sign and implement the Joint Mechanism, then "it can't do anything." The Tamils, she continued, would be completely disillusioned and would be justified in returning to war.

16. (C) Ambassador shifted discussion to the Cease Fire Agreement, which he said appeared to be coming under increasing stress as both sides seemed to be committing violent acts, although the murky situation made it hard to tell who was doing what. Kumaratunga responded: "It's hard for me to know also." It was possible, she said that "some low-level people" in the police or the military were supporting the Karuna faction. She also said that police had just arrested two members of the anti-LTTE Tamil group PLOTE for the murder of the journalist Sivaram, implying that this showed the Government was not involved. Ambassador stressed that there were other killings happening, that there was a need to find a way to bring the level of violence down, and said Co-Chairs would need to mention this.

17. (C) Kumaratunga said that the Tigers have given a lot in agreeing to the Joint Mechanism, in effect admitting the sovereignty of the GSL and, for the first time, conceding that Muslims as a group had a right to representation. She had just finished discussing the Joint Mechanism with 9 Muslim MP's. They wanted two changes in the Joint Mechanism. She had asked them which change was most important and had promised to raise the issue with Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar to see if he could take it up with the LTTE. Kumaratunga ended by reaffirming that she still intended to sign the Joint Mechanism, "certainly within a few weeks."

18. (C) Comment: Kumaratunga's resolve on the Joint Mechanism is apparently as strong as ever, but she faces an uphill battle (See septel on other Joint Mechanism developments.) She believes the JVP will not leave the Government if she signs; all facts point the other way. Her comment that she hopes to sign "by the end of the month" or "in a few weeks" is discouraging, as this date seems to keep fading into the distance. It seems to us--and to many other observers here--that the longer she waits the more difficult the task will become. Any attempt to reopen the text for negotiation, as she seems to have suggested to the Muslims, will also cause problems.

LUNSTEAD